

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-15 DRC-01 /126 W

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R 150146Z OCT 73

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1832

INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 5652

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, AS

SUBJ: PROSPECTS FOR EARLY AUSTRALIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS

REF: CANBERRA 5655

1. BY REFTEL EMBASSY IS FORWARDING FAIRLY EXTENDED ANALYSIS OF PROSPECTS FOR EARLY AUSTRALIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS. GROWING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES FACING LABOR GOVERNMENT AT PRESENT AND OVER PAST SEVERAL MONTHS HAVE HAD CONSEQUENCE OF SIGNIFICANTLY DIMINISHING ALP SUPPORT AMONG PUBLIC. IF ELECTIONS ARE HELD OVER NEXT TWO MONTHS OR SO (I.E., BY EARLY DECEMBER), CONSENSUS OF MOST OBSERVERS IS THAT LABOR WOULD LOSE GOVERNMENT, RETURNING LIBERAL-COUNTRY COALITION TO POWER. LABOR'S PROSPECTS IN GENERAL ELECTIONS IN SPRING OF 1974 ARE NOT VERY GOOD, EITHER. PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM'S POLITICAL INTEREST IS TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS AS LONG AS POSSIBLE, IN THE HOPE THAT A TREND MORE FAVORABLE TO LABOR WILL SET IN OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS.

2. THE TACTICS OF FORCING AN ELECTION ARE COMPLEX. COMBINED LIBERAL-COUNTRY-DLP PARTIES IN SENATE (WHERE
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THEY HAVE SMALL BUT ADEQUATE MAJORITY) COULD REFUSE

TO PASS APPROPRIATIONS BILL WHICH WOULD HAVE CONSEQUENCE OF DENYING GOVERNMENT OPERATING FUNDS AFTER NOVEMBER 30. IF APPROPRIATIONS BILL COULD BE DEFEATED IN NEXT FEW WEEKS, PRIME MINISTER WOULD BE FORCED TO CALL GENERAL ELECTIONS WHICH COULD BE HELD SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH REFERENDUM ON PRICES AND INCOMES DEC 8.

3. WHITLAM GOVERNMENT FOR ITS PART IS NOT WITHOUT RESOURCES. IT COULD DELAY PRESENTATION OF APPROPRIATIONS BILL FOR FINAL VOTE IN SENATE UNTIL LATE NOVEMBER, MAKING IT EXTREMELY DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, FOR DECEMBER ELECTIONS TO BE ORGANIZED IN TIME. NO AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL PARTY WOULD DARE PRESS FOR ELECTIONS DURING SACRED HOLIDAY SEASON, MID-DECEMBER TO END OF JANUARY. SOME OPPORTUNITY WOULD ARISE IN SPRING OF 1974 WHEN QTE SUPPLY BILL END QTE (SOMETHING LIKE CONTINUING RESOLUTION AUTHORITY) WOULD BE PRESENTED FOR PASSAGE BY HOUSE AND SENATE. SENATE REJECTION OF SUPPLY BILL IN SPRING OF 1974 COULD ALSO FORCE ELECTION AT THAT TIME.

4. KEY TO RESOLUTION OF QUESTION WHETHER ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD EITHER IN DECEMBER OR SPRING OF 1974

WILL CLEARLY BE DEMOCRATIC LABOR PARTY, WHOSE FIVE SENATORS HOLD BALANCE OF POWER IN SENATE. DLP FACES LOSS OF TWO OR THREE SENATE SEATS IN SENATE ELECTIONS, UNLESS IT IS ABLE TO WORK OUT ELECTION DEAL WITH LIBERAL AND COUNTRY PARTIES. DLP DECISION ON WHETHER TO PRESS FOR EARLY GENERAL ELECTIONS EXPECTED THIS WEEK.
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